

8TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler

READ:
MATTHEW
13:31-33, 44-52

“The kingdom of
heaven is like treasure
hidden in a field...”

A POEM:

The Bright Field by R.S. Thomas

I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the pearl
of great price, the one field that had
the treasure in it. I realize now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it. Life is not hurrying

on to a receding future, nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.

REFLECT:

The photo overleaf was taken several years ago while we were holidaying in Northumberland. We were driving in the car in that magical kind of golden afternoon light you sometimes get when the sky ahead is dark with rain clouds and the low sun shines brightly from behind. One field of yellow stubble appeared to be glowing, bathed in the most beautiful light, and Carolyn - being a photographer - just had to pull the car over and jump out to try to capture this fleeting gift. When I read the collection of parables the lectionary has set for today, I can't help but think of that R.S. Thomas poem, and the October afternoon when we "turned aside" to behold the simple, breathtaking gift of a sunlit field.

Jesus' parables are tantalising, mysterious and rich with meaning. One thing this set seems to convey is the kingdom of heaven as treasure hidden in the ordinary, a gift that others might miss. Receiving the gift of God's presence in the everyday requires being present enough to recognise it and, as Thomas suggests, letting it stop us in our tracks.

There is also something surprisingly, deliciously subversive in these tales. Yeast was forbidden in the use of baking breads for particular Jewish festivals and rituals, and could be seen as a corrupting influence. The someone who finds treasure in a field is decidedly underhanded in the way he goes about claiming it. The merchant who finds the pearl makes himself destitute to possess it; hardly a story of success by any worldly standards. And hardy mustard bushes grew like weeds in Palestine, the tiny seeds getting mixed up and hidden among those farmers actually intended to plant.

This week I listened to a wonderful interview with Sister Helen Prejean, whose friendship with an inmate on death row has been depicted in a film, *Dead Man Walking*. She kept using the delightful term "sneaky Jesus" to describe her experiences, telling how when she accepted an invitation to write a letter to a prisoner on death row she never imagined she'd end up going to visit him, and when she went to visit, never imagined she'd agree to be his "spiritual advisor", and on accepting this, never imagined that it meant she'd be present at his execution, where hers would be the last face he'd see, and where she would endeavour to be "the face of love" for him. "That's 'sneaky Jesus' for you."

CONNECT:

- Where have you noticed heaven in the ordinary?
- Where have you encountered 'sneaky Jesus'?

RESOURCES AND CONTACTS:

Our friends at Wheatley URC have a huge archive of online sermons you can listen to, and are regularly posting new resources on their website:

www.wheatleyurc.org.uk

If you need any help, have a prayer request, or would like someone to talk to; please contact your elder or one of us:

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